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Istook Calls for State Help at I-40 Groundbreaking

Oklahoma City, OK – Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Warr Acres) joins state and local officials at 10 a.m. Monday to break ground for the new alignment of Interstate 40 just south of downtown Oklahoma City.

Istook says this critical project will replace a long-obsolete elevated expressway that was costly to maintain and on the brink of becoming unsafe to carry its daily load of nearly 125,000 passengers.

"This is a big boost for all of Oklahoma transportation, right in the heart of the state. We'll have a huge boost in capacity, and that makes a lot of growth possible," says Istook. "Rather than having six lanes, the new I-40 will have ten lanes. And creating a new boulevard on the old right of way will greatly improve access to our growing downtown."

Unfortunately, this project has been totally dependent on federal funds. Istook and Sen. Jim Inhofe led the Oklahoma congressional delegation's efforts and secured \$310 million of the \$360-million project. However, the state of Oklahoma has continually refused to provide a single cent to the state's largest road project. The lack of state involvement is why a \$50-million funding gap remains.

"It's incredible that the state gave no help even last year when it enjoyed over \$700 million in unexpected revenue thanks to a booming oil and gas sector," says Istook.

Istook also points out that the state's delays in funding the I-40 Crosstown have made the project more expensive because costs keep rising.

"The \$360-million cost is already \$115 million more than when the current design was unveiled in 1998," says Istook. "Higher energy costs and global competition for construction materials will keep pushing the cost up. Already, one recent round of construction bids was rejected because the low bid on one segment was way above the budget. The longer the state delays, the more the project will cost."

"Yes, it's time to celebrate the groundbreaking, but it's also time to insist that state government start providing some of the help."

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